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SUBJECT: NATO SYG-DESIGNATE EAGER TO BEGIN NEEDED REFORMS

Classified By: Charge Terence McCulley, reasons 1.4b,d

1.(C) Summary: In a two-hour working luncheon April 30 with visiting U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kurt Volker, former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen underscored his determination to reform the NATO Alliance as its next Secretary General and transform it into a more dynamic and effective organization. Rasmussen reviewed his thinking on the new Strategic Concept, headquarters reform and staffing, early implementation of Strasbourg Summit decisions and efforts to strengthen NATO's public diplomacy. Ambassador Volker indicated full U.S. support for aggressive reform, urging the SYG-designate to be bold in his approach. Rasmussen emphasized the need for confirmation of greater SYG control over resources and staff in order to effect such reforms. With Rasmussen and separately with Danish officials, Ambassador Volker reviewed Turkish concerns about Rasmussen's appointment. End summary.

12. (C) NATO Secretary General-designate Rasmussen conveyed his appreciation to President Obama and General Jones for U.S. support of his candidacy, acknowledging its challenges but also emphasizing his personal dedication to the transatlantic relationship. Rasmussen signaled that he is already at work on his transition, with a small office at the Danish MFA and ongoing informal consultations (including with current Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer on May 4). Throughout the conversation, Rasmussen made clear that he is keen to get to work and that he intends to move decisively to reinvigorate NATO.

13. (C) Rasmussen indicated that he had given considerable thought to the process for the new Strategic Concept, but remained uncertain about how to proceed, especially in this transition period. He told Ambassador Volker that he thought the experts group should be about 10-12 members, but acknowledged that getting the composition right would be challenging (Rasmussen said that he had already been besieged with proposed candidates). Ambassador Volker urged Rasmussen to act on his instincts to move quickly and to work with Jaap to establish the experts group now, to allow for participation in seminars and discussions from June onwards. The U.S. favors an ambitious Strategic Concept, for which it will take time to build consensus, Ambassador Volker noted; this argues for getting started as quickly as possible. Rasmussen indicated that he would raise this with Jaap the following week and would be prepared to discuss the Strategic Concept further with General Jones at the end of May in Washington.

14. (S/NF) Current Danish Ambassador to Turkey Jesper Vahr, a previous MFA security policy head with NATO experience, will head the Private Office, Rasmussen informed us, suggesting that Vahr's Turkish connections could also prove helpful in that role. Ambassador Volker discussed the possibility of restoring the American deputy director position to its

previous status as senior deputy, and offered to share the names and biographies of our proposed candidates for that position. Rasmussen suggested that we do so directly with Vahr. Ambassador Volker briefed Rasmussen on the intelligence support we have provided previous Secretaries General and offered the same for him, which Rasmussen readily and gratefully accepted.

15. (C) Ambassador Volker explained that the U.S. has become frustrated with the pace of decision-making and the inefficiency of discussions within NATO. The Obama administration will offer its full support for as much reform as he can manage, Ambassador Volker told Rasmussen, arguing that the new SYG should break patterns and not simply do things the way they have always been done in Brussels. Rasmussen reported that he had reviewed accounts of recent council meetings and was disappointed to see how much time and effort were evidently wasted. This has to change, he agreed. Ambassador Volker reviewed some ideas under discussion to improve the NAC, including more focused agendas, assignment of lead speakers and an end to the practice of everyone speaking in turn for a few minutes each. The SYG sets the agenda, Ambassador Volker emphasized, and encouraged Rasmussen to promote active, engaged discussion, working more as a moderator than as an official who simply presides over the meetings. Rasmussen indicated that he intends to do just that, and will think about ways to implement these changes without causing undue consternation among some allies.

16. (C) Rasmussen emphasized that his reforms will depend on securing unfettered authority to reallocate resources and staff within NATO, and hoped that the June defense ministerial could confirm this. Ambassador Volker suggested that some allies might object to this being a defense ministers' decision alone and that Rasmussen might call on his former head of government colleagues to ensure that he gets the authority he needs. Rasmussen also suggested that he would like to see more ministerials and summits, provided that he can ensure that they are more efficient and worth the participants' time. Ambassador Volker commented that one would be hard pressed to find a more pro-NATO group than the Obama administration, but he suspected that even the current Secretaries of State and Defense would need to be convinced that there had been real changes to warrant more frequent meetings at that level.

17. (C) Another priority for the next SYG will have to be strategic communications, Ambassador Volker said, noting that NATO does a poor job of selling itself even to its own publics and cannot keep pace with day-to-day developments in the media. Rasmussen was enthusiastic in his response, suggesting that this an area in which he also intends to make a dramatic difference. The NATO Secretary General should be much more visible, he said, and should take a leading role in public debate on issues concerning the Alliance. Rasmussen pointed to Denmark's funding of NATO television as an indication of his (previous) government's interest in this regard, and agreed that NATO needs additional staff and resources devoted to strategic communication.

18. (C) Rasmussen observed that overcoming Turkish opposition to his appointment had been difficult, but reported that he had met with Turkish PM Erdogan two days after the NATO Summit and that there no longer any issues between them. Ambassador Volker explained that we had heard complaints from the Turks on a number of issues related to follow-through on the discussions at Strasbourg, including Roj-TV, NATO ASG and flag officer positions, and Rasmussen's public remarks in Istanbul. Rasmussen allowed that he had not been in touch with Turks recently, but both he and PM national security advisor Thomas Ahrenkiel (in a separate conversation) maintained that these issues are being addressed. Ahrenkiel acknowledged that he should follow up quietly with his Turkish counterpart.

19. (C) On Roj-TV, both Rasmussen and Ahrenkiel said that action must remain within law enforcement and intelligence

channels, and welcomed the proposed visit of S/CT officials to Copenhagen review the case and discuss strategy. Rasmussen noted that President Obama had indicated to him clear understanding for Denmark's position that it must follow its own laws in the matter. Regarding NATO appointments, the Assistant Secretary General position would have to wait until Rasmussen is in place, but it could be helpful if the U.S. were to propose the slot, Rasmussen said. On the flag officer billet, Ambassador Volker confirmed that we have already offered the Turks a one-star position through military channels. Rasmussen noted that his speech at the Istanbul Alliance of Civilizations event (praised by both the Turkish MFA spokesman and the Turkish ambassador to NATO) had been unfortunately cut short by the event organizers and was never delivered in full.

¶10. (C) Comment: Former PM Rasmussen's conversation with Ambassador Volker suggests that we have an energetic, reform-oriented partner in the next NATO secretary general and it is important to engage him early in his preparations to take office. We recommend that in addition to NSA Jones, Rasmussen also meet with Secretaries Clinton and Gates during his May 26-27 visit to Washington. These early discussions in Copenhagen confirm our view that Rasmussen will not hesitate to use his considerable political skills and stature as a former head of government to make NATO into a more efficient, capable and respected organization.

¶11. (U) This message has been cleared by Ambassador Volker.

MCCULLEY